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Annual report of the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC)

This report is submitted in compliance with the requirement set out in paragraph 65 of the Declaration adopted at the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (London, June 1999), to report annually to the Regional Committee and to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy. It summarizes the work done and the decisions taken by the EEHC since September 2002.

As requested in paragraph 66 of the London Conference Declaration, the EEHC also submits its final proposals for the agenda of the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, to be held from 23 to 25 June 2004, for approval by the Regional Committee and the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy.

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Introduction

1. The European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) met in Budapest on 28 and 29 November 2002 and in Copenhagen on 28 and 29 April 2003. The work of the EEHC focused on preparations for the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, Hungary, 23–25 June 2004).
2. Information on current membership (representation of countries, intergovernmental/international and nongovernmental organizations and major groups) can be found on the EEHC's web site (www.eehc.dk). Ms Zsuzsanna Jakab was elected Chairperson and Ms Helena Cizkova Vice-chairperson.

Commitment to action following the London Conference: Highlights

Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

3. To date, eight countries have ratified the Protocol and ratifications expected by the early spring of 2004 should enable the Protocol to enter into force in time for the first Meeting of the Parties to be convened in Budapest, in conjunction with the Fourth Ministerial Conference. Countries which have not yet ratified the Protocol are encouraged to do so.
4. The Second Meeting of the Signatory Parties will take place from 2 to 4 July 2003 at the UNECE in Geneva, provided that at least 19 Signatories (i.e. the majority of Signatories) will be present. A special session will provide guidance to countries on the procedure for ratification of the Protocol.
5. Meetings held during the year included the second meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (Budapest, Hungary, 22–23 October 2002) and the Second International Conference on Sustainable Management of Transboundary Waters in Europe (Miedzyzdroje, Poland, 21–24 April 2002), which coincided with the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention.
6. Other activities carried out included conducting a training programme on aquatic and clinical microbiology in Romania; evaluating drinking-water laboratories in Latvia; implementing a programme on water supply structures and water-related diseases in central Asian countries; strengthening drinking-water quality laboratories in Turkmenistan; supporting environmental health and recreational water management in Malta; and promoting implementation of the Protocol in Georgia, with the support of Denmark.
7. The guidance developed in the context of activities related to the Protocol has formed the basis for country-specific health work by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and UNECE, under both bilateral and multi-country programmes.

Transport, environment and health

8. The Second High-Level Meeting on Transport, Environment and Health (Geneva, 5 July 2002) was attended by ministers and representatives of these three sectors from 38 Member States of UNECE and WHO (European Region). Through the Declaration they adopted, participants:
 - (a) established the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP), to be administered under the auspices of UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, focusing on: (i) integration of environmental and health aspects into transport policy; (ii) demand-side management and modal shift; (iii) urban transport; and (iv) cross-cutting issues (specific needs and problems of the newly independent states (NIS) and south-eastern European countries, as well as ecologically sensitive areas of the Region);
 - (b) established a Steering Committee with overall responsibility for implementing THE PEP;

- (c) committed themselves to ensuring effective implementation of THE PEP, including through allocation of adequate resources and financial means, and to ensuring adequate participation of representatives of NIS and south-eastern European countries;
- (d) requested that THE PEP be submitted as a Type II partnership at the World Summit on Sustainable Development – WSSD (Johannesburg, 26 August – 4 September 2002).

9. The first meeting of THE PEP Steering Committee (Geneva, 10–11 April 2003), attended by representatives of 29 Member States, agreed on its rules of procedure and organization of work and elected its twelve-member Bureau. The Committee also agreed on the following priority activities to be implemented in the period 2003–2005: establishment of a Clearing House on Transport, Environment and Health; elaboration and implementation of urban plans for transport sustainable for health and the environment; implementation of a project on transport-related health impacts and their costs; and establishment of a set of indicators to monitor the integration of environmental and health aspects into transport policies and the impact of these policies on health and the environment.

Implementing national environmental health action plans in partnership

10. New national environmental health action plans (NEHAPs) were developed by Armenia, Denmark, Georgia, Ireland, Lithuania and the Netherlands. To date, 43 countries are implementing NEHAPs. A pilot evaluation in 11 Member States indicated the importance of NEHAPs for strengthening collaboration between the health and environment sectors and for enhancing legislative and institutional capacities in the countries acceding to membership of the European Union (EU). The evaluation also demonstrated the need to continue implementing, evaluating and revising NEHAPs according to the new regional, subregional and national priorities in environmental health; improve communication of the process; and link it more closely to national initiatives on sustainable development.

Children's health and the environment

11. A workshop on children's environmental health indicators was jointly organized by WHO and the European Environment Agency on 7 and 8 December 2002 to develop the framework for a key set of indicators, along with indicator templates and profiles. Feasibility testing of the indicators will take place in the latter part of 2003, and a report will be available at the Fourth Ministerial Conference.

12. An analysis has been initiated on the environmental burden of disease in the European Region, with a special focus on the exposure of children to the main environmental risk factors such as indoor and outdoor air pollution, lead, contaminated water and injuries. Its aim is to improve the evidence base for policy development and priority-setting in the different subregions. The results will contribute to the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe, and the final report will be available at the Ministerial Conference.

Environment and health research

13. The Liaison Group on Environmental Health Research for Europe, jointly established by the European Commission, the European Science Foundation (ESF) and WHO, in collaboration with the Research Centre for Environmental Health of the Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health, and the participation of the European Environment Agency (EEA), organized a conference on "An environment for better health" in Århus, Denmark from 8 to 10 May 2003. The conference, supported under the Fifth EU Framework Programme, gathered together 100 leaders of European environmental health research and decision-makers from 16 European countries. It underlined the need for a strong scientific evidence base for decision-making, especially in regard to policies focusing on children's environment and health. It also illustrated the relevance of current research to the development and implementation of policies supporting public health; for example, recent research on the health effects of air pollution guides the

development of European clean air policies, and research on gene-environment interactions opens up new prospects for an asthma prevention strategy.

14. The conference stressed the need for specific and sustained funding of multidisciplinary environmental health research and for continuing dialogue between research and environmental health decision-makers, as a condition for the effective use of scientific evidence in policy-making as well as an important determinant of research priority-setting. The conclusions of the conference will be summarized in a document prepared for the Fourth Ministerial Conference.

Good practice in health, environment and safety management in enterprises

15. WHO guidelines on good practice in workplace health have been developed to raise awareness about the role of occupational health, to advocate for changes in the management of health at work, and to build up networks. Country occupational health and safety profiles were prepared in 18 Member States, with the help of the European network of WHO collaborating centres, and published by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.

Environment and health impact assessment

16. Negotiations on a Protocol on Strategic Environment Assessment to the UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context were successfully completed at the Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in Kiev in May 2003. Signed by 33 Member States of UNECE, the Protocol places special emphasis on human health and requires that health be considered when strategic environment assessments are carried out.

Early health effects of climate change and stratospheric ozone depletion

17. Four topic-specific technical meetings were organized on climate change in relation to allergic disorders, foodborne diseases, vector-borne diseases and heat adaptation measures.

18. The first volume in a new technical series on global environmental changes and health has been prepared.¹ Guidelines on how to assess the health effects of climate change have been produced and will be launched at the Conference of the Parties to the Climate Convention. WHO has formally agreed to participate in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and is developing case studies for it.

Preparations for the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health "The future for our children"

19. The Fourth Ministerial Conference is scheduled to take place in Budapest from 23 to 25 June 2004. Information on developments and activities can be found on the Budapest Conference web site (www.euro.who.int/budapest2004) and the EEHC web site (www.eehc.dk). In its role as Steering Committee, the EEHC reviewed progress made on the priority issues to be addressed at the Conference and the expected policy outcomes.

20. The priority issues can be grouped into three main areas, each of which may be the subject of a Conference session. The first concerns the progress made in environment and health in Europe since the First European Conference on Environment and Health (Frankfurt, December 1989). It will assess the progress made since then, focusing on the countries of eastern Europe, the Caucasus and central Asia; evaluate the impact of the environment and health process in Europe; review the extent to which

¹ Kovats S, Menne B, McMichael AJ, et al., eds. *Climate change and stratospheric ozone depletion: early effects on our health in Europe*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2000 (WHO Regional Publications, European Series, No. 88).

decisions taken at the Third Conference (London, 1999) have been implemented; and identify where further action is needed. The second area focuses on developing tools for policy-making. It will examine the impact of the environment on health, based on evidence concerning the environmental burden of disease, and the need to develop a pan-European system for policy-oriented reporting and assessment (environment and health indicators), as well as to organize and share the information gathered from such assessment, monitoring and reporting. It will also examine practical application of the precautionary approach in environment and health decision-making, with special reference to children. The third main area highlights three issues of emerging or increasing importance: housing and health; energy, health and sustainable development; and regional implementation of the outcomes of the WSSD.

21. A major policy outcome of the Budapest Conference is envisaged to be a Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE). The CEHAPE proposes specific actions to address the main environmental risk factors that children are exposed to in their daily lives. For each of the actions proposed, the CEHAPE specifies the main objectives to be attained (i.e. reduction and/or elimination of children's exposure to environmental risk factors), highlights the settings in which action should be taken, and indicates the sectors that should be responsible for taking action. The CEHAPE addresses the particular needs of individual Member States by providing tools for priority-setting, institutional development, building partnerships, and information, education and communication (IEC) that will allow them to adapt the Plan according to their own circumstances.

22. A follow-up mechanism, such as the EEHC, would probably be needed to help ensure implementation of the Budapest Conference outcomes. The EEHC considered that an independent assessment of the 10 years of operation of the EEHC would be useful and requested WHO to prepare a proposal for doing this.

23. The active participation of various stakeholders in the Budapest Conference is important not only in the process leading up to and including the event itself, but also to give effect to the expected outcomes. The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) has taken the lead in engaging nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other major groups in the Budapest Conference process, facilitated by the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe. EPHA has established a new Region-wide platform of health and environment major groups (EPHA Environment Network), which is expected to be actively engaged in preparing for the Budapest Conference. Depending on funding, envisaged activities include a preparatory meeting, a ministerial round table discussion focusing on the role of the various stakeholders in implementation of the CEHAPE and regional follow-up of the WSSD; and "Healthy Planet Forum 2", a parallel event to the Budapest Conference involving major groups of partners. The meaningful contribution of children and young people to the Budapest Conference is also being developed, with the United Nations Environment Programme as focal point. Pending the receipt of adequate funding, proposed projects include "Young minds for healthier environments", which aims to educate young people in issues relevant to sustainable development through student participation and action, international collaboration and information technology; "Children for healthy and environmentally friendly housing", which aims to increase children's awareness and understanding of the importance and relevance of healthy and environmentally friendly housing to them; and "The environment and my health", which will develop an educational resource "kit" for use by educators (teachers and NGOs) and parents of primary school-age children.

24. A comprehensive communications strategy has been developed, aimed at raising awareness of the Budapest Conference. Aimed at policy-makers, a wide range of stakeholders, the media, public, and children themselves, the main tools will be the conference web site, major events such as World Health Day, press materials, videos, communication and education workshops, and various awards.

25. To help ensure adequate consultation with Member States on the process and outcomes of the Budapest Conference, the Second Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting took place in Stockholm on 26 and 27 June 2003. The meeting welcomed the development of CEHAPE and endorsed a workplan for its finalization. In discussion, participants looked forward to a concise policy-oriented document that would provide a strategic framework with clear targets and objectives. With that in mind, the meeting

decided to set up an ad hoc working group to do further work on the CEHAPE. Delegations also expressed their support for the proposed framework of the Budapest Conference Declaration and recommended that it should be presented in a short, attractive format, focusing on the main messages, challenges and major policy outcomes. Participants strongly supported inclusion of the issue of the precautionary principle on the agenda of the Budapest Conference, and they called for the further development of a policy document that would provide guidance on the practical application of that principle, as an aid for policy-making. The meeting also strongly supported further development of the environment and health information system, which should also serve to monitor implementation of the CEHAPE. While the priority issues addressed at the Budapest Conference would be of pan-European relevance, the meeting noted that the subregional needs of the newly independent states warranted particular emphasis. Due note was also taken of the need to develop closer links with other pan-European processes, such as the "Environment for Europe" process.

26. The ninth meeting of the EEHC will take place in Prague on 9 and 10 October 2003: according to the rules of procedure, countries which are not members can attend by special invitation of the Chairperson. The Third Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting will take place in Evora, Portugal on 27 and 28 November 2003; the pre-Conference meeting is tentatively scheduled for 25 and 26 March 2004 (venue to be confirmed).